

ŌTAKI SCHOOL KOREA 2020

Tena koutou katoa - e kui ma, e koro ma nga mihi mahana ki a koutou katoa

Tena koutou kua huihui mai nei i tenei wa mo tenei moumahara

te hunga mate - ki te hunga mate - tatou te hunga ora e tau nei

tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa

I acknowledge those who have come before us – and I acknowledge and greet everyone here today.

Among the special people here today, I especially acknowledge those Veterans of the Korean War who are here at this very special place for them – a place of memorialisation, remembrance and reflection.

I also especially acknowledge two people who are this ceremony for the first time - our host Matua Rauru Walker, Tumuaki/Principal of Ōtaki School, and His Excellency Mr Sangjin Lee, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to New Zealand. Their presence has influenced me in choosing the form of my words this morning.

When we slide into taking special things for granted, their special nature can just slip away. To avoid this, we need to be able to place a value on those things we cherish, and to do this we really need to understand the foundations on which that value is based. Today those foundations are the occasion and the place.

The occasion is remembrance of the Korean War, which started on 25 June 1950 when North Korean forces launched a surprise attack across the border into South Korea, and to remember, too, those who fought and died in the three years of conflict; including the around two and a half million civilians who lost their lives.

The place is here – where we are standing – at Ōtaki School. It is a relatively small space but - in the words of the proverb – *ahakoa he iti, he pounamu* – it may be small but it is precious.

In front of us are two small plaques.

The plaque on the right tells us that the magnificent pohutukawa tree we can see was planted to mark the 40th anniversary of the Korean War ceasefire; the guns falling silent with the signing of an armistice on 27 July 1953. The pohutukawa tree has a deep spiritual meaning for Māori, connecting the beginning and ending of human life. In Māori mythology, the red flowers of the tree represent the blood of the warrior Tawhaki, a spirit ancestor who showed the way from earth to heaven but fell and died in doing so. So, this memorial, plaque and tree, is, in its elements, uniquely a New Zealand memorial.

The memorial on the left was donated in 2013 by the Korean Embassy. It is a simple stone – observing that in Korean culture for something to be special in nature it needs to be simple and natural. This stone, therefore, in its form, represents Korea.

And so, these two memorials, alongside each other, represent New Zealand and Korea – and signal a joint commitment to remember the Veterans of the Korean War - and their service for both countries in a land and in a war far from here – almost seventy years ago. And that makes both this occasion and this place, in their own ways, unique and special.

I would like to close with this pepeha:

Kia mau ki te kura whero, kei mau koe ki te kura tāwhiwhi kei waiho koe hei whakamōmona mō te whenua tāngata – when you have something of value, guard it

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa